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SUBJECT: JAPAN: POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS ON BURMA

Classified By: Charge D' Affairs Joseph R. Donovan, reasons 1.4(b),(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Thus far, Japan has taken a number of steps to influence events in Burma, including formal protests at the ministerial level. However, Japan can do more to signal to the Burmese junta that it is increasingly isolated. This cable summarizes Embassy Tokyo's view on possible next steps the United States can encourage Japan to take, including narrowing down what Japan refers to as humanitarian ODA, limiting travel and exchange programs for Burmese officials, increasing refugee numbers, taking more active leadership in multilateral efforts, and extending export controls. End summary.

¶2. (C) Japan publicly welcomed the October 11 UNSC Presidential Statement on Burma, and has issued public statements deploring the use of violence against peaceful demonstrations in Burma on several occasions over the past two weeks. Foreign Minister Komura and Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka have also protested formally to their counterparts over the death of a Japanese journalist, while encouraging Burma's leaders to release political prisoners, exercise restraint, and engage in dialogue with the opposition.

¶3. (C) Japan currently grants only humanitarian assistance to Burma, according to Embassy contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Those contacts confirm that Japan is currently considering narrowing down that humanitarian assistance, as noted in a policy paper issued by MOFA on October 4, three days after Deputy Minister Yabunaka's meetings in Burma. The document cites assistance to a human resources development center as one possible area to cut, while noting that truly humanitarian aid, such as the provision of polio vaccines, should remain in place. Cuts in official development assistance (ODA) are probably the simplest, most symbolic steps that Japan can take to send a signal to both Burma's leaders and the international community. MOFA contacts have also expressed interest in funneling their remaining ODA through non-governmental organizations. The United States could encourage those efforts.

¶4. (C) Limiting the entry of Burmese officials into Japan, to include a freeze on scholarship and training programs for those officials, is another possible step under consideration, according to MOFA. The United States could encourage a visa ban on regime members and their families, as well as a limit on senior-level exchanges. Such measures are easy to implement, even if they are largely symbolic, given the small number of official exchanges between Japan and Burma, and the fact that many Burmese officials who are

considered friendly toward Japan are under house arrest or out of favor. As the flip-side to entry restrictions, the United States could encourage Japan to improve its poor record on accepting Burmese refugees. Japan accepted only 28 asylum applications out of 626 from Burmese who applied in 2006.

15. (C) Japan's strong embrace of the UNSC Presidential Statement, coupled with the ministerial level demarches, may indicate that Prime Minister Fukuda is amenable to making additional strong statements on Burma, or supporting additional multilateral efforts. MOFA has already told the Embassy that Japan wants to take part in international dialogue on Burma. The United States could encourage Japan and Prime Minister Fukuda himself to play a greater leadership role in international efforts.

16. (C) Targeted export controls are another possible step that Japan might take to gain Burma's attention. However, any attempt to limit wide categories of Japanese exports, or halt investment, are likely to generate a strong, negative reaction from the Japanese business community here. This could prove tricky to the new Fukuda administration, particularly given the unsettled domestic political climate in which the administration believes needs all the support it can get.
DONOVAN